

Srivani Jade to Perform Hindustani Khayal at UW

By [Roxanne Ray](#)

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Srivani Jade comes from an intensely musical family, and was introduced to music at the age of four by her father Bhavani Prasad Jade and uncle Raghavendra Tilwalli. • **Photo by Studio Disha**

[The University of Washington School of Music](#) regularly hosts visiting artists, who come to teach, practice, and learn together with UW faculty and students. The current visiting artist in Ethnomusicology is [Srivani Jade](#), who is focusing on the music of North India.

As a capstone to this artistic residency, Jade will be performing with students on March 10 at UW, and the focus of this concert will be Hindustani Khayal. “Khayal, meaning ‘imagination’ in Persian, is an improvisational art form that originated in the Mughal courts in the 18th century, and is the predominant classical genre of vocal music today,” Jade said.

According to Jade, for many centuries, the voice has been considered the principal instrument in India. “Khayal involves a slow and gradual unfolding of a raga (or mode) through one or more compositions,” she explained, “over several movements of increasing melodic range and complexity, moving from a relaxed pace to faster rhythmic cycles.”

Jade appreciates Khayal for its ability to accommodate the individual interests of each musician. “Khayal attracted me first and foremost because it allows a very personal exploration of a raga, mediated only by the composition ‘off of’ which we improvise,” she said. “I also like that the lyrics are inclusively secular, and you can sing about virtually anything that inspires you.”

With that freedom, Jade has explored widely. “I have composed a bandish about the squirrels at play in my backyard!” she said. “The monsoons and other seasonal tropes are more common, and traditional. Love and loss are common topics, too.”

Jade’s passion for music began very early. “There was always music playing in the house—the radio, records, or my father playing an instrument,” she said.

Although Jade studied Carnatic (South Indian Classical) music during childhood, she experienced a lengthy gap before returning to formal lessons. “I didn’t resume until after I finished my Masters in Engineering, got married, and started working as an engineer in Seattle,” she said. “In the meantime, listening to music was my ‘recharge’ activity after a long day of work.”

Her interest in music then moved northward. “I gravitated toward the beauty and complexity of North Indian Classical music, and developed an appreciation of good music from all the different Gharanas,” she said. “I fell in love with Amir Khan Saheb’s monumental Khayals, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan Saheb’s lilting Thumris, and started digging for more.”

Motherhood deepened this interest further. “In the year 2000, I started singing to my newborn son,” Jade said. “This put me back ‘in touch’ with my music ... and indeed with myself. I rediscovered music as a deeply personal and spiritual medium of expression.”

At this point, Jade’s career interests also began to shift. “I did not consider a career in music, and went with Engineering all the way through graduate school,” she said. “After that, I had a fairly decent career spanning almost a decade in various technology companies, but realized at some point that I was happiest while singing.”

When her son became a toddler, Jade pursued this passion more seriously. “In retrospect, the universe seems to have conspired in my favor, and brought a wonderful Guru, Pandit Parameshwar Hegde, into my life, in 2002,” she said.

Jade worked for four years, both in the United States and in India, on the Kirana Gharana style of Khayal, before preparing to perform. “In 2006, I debuted with a solo concert in a major festival for emerging artists in Bengaluru.”

Since then, Jade has focused on her practice and on sharing the music with others. “As Artist-in-Residence, I am an ambassador of my art form. I like to not only make music and share it freely, but be available as a resource to anyone who may have an interest or even curiosity about Indian classical music,” she said. “Everything comes full circle in this role—performing, teaching, observing, learning.”

This new multi-faceted role has not always been without challenges, which have more to do with organization than with the music itself. “People often think the ‘language barrier’ might pose a problem, as I usually sing in various dialects of Hindi, and some Marathi, Kannada, Urdu, and Punjabi,” she said. “But I have never had an issue building a bridge through the medium of human experience. Music transcends language.”

Instead, it is the challenge of multiple roles that poses the most conflict. “The real challenges have been mostly internal—of balancing the various demands on my time as mother, teacher, and musician—and staying focused on the music,” she said. “It’s also a challenge balancing the external and active side of it (performing schedule and travel) with the internal and still side (introspection, deep listening, and riyaz). Usually it involves the word ‘discipline.’”

The importance of discipline emerges for Jade as part of music’s independence from each individual musician who practices it. “Music has a mind of its own,” she said. “You don’t ever master it. You learn and practice, but hope and pray that it may one day master you!”

“It’s quite humbling really,” she said.

Srivani Jade performs on March 10 at 7:30 p.m. at the Brechemin Auditorium on the University of Washington campus. She will be joined by her students for this presentation of Hindustani khayal, a form of Indian classical music. \$5 cash or check at the door. For more information, visit music.washington.edu/events.